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SIU Hotline: 0800 037 774
Email: info@siu.org.za
www.siu.org.za



**MEDIA STATEMENT
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
9 MARCH 2023**

FORMER LIMPOPO HOD FAILS TO CONVINCING TRIBUNAL TO CONSIDER RELEASING HER PENSION BENEFITS

The Special Investigating Unit (SIU) welcomes the Special Tribunal order dismissing, with costs, an application brought by a former Head of Department of the Limpopo Department of Health, Dr Thokozani Florence Mhlongo, to reconsider an order authorising the Unit to freeze her pension benefits.

In October 2022, the SIU obtained a preservation order from the Special Tribunal to freeze Dr. Mhlongo's pension benefits and interdicted the Government Employees Pension Fund from paying out or transferring any benefits due to Mhlongo. Dr Mhlongo unsuccessfully approached the Special Tribunal to reconsider the order.

The SIU applies for preservation orders early in its investigations when it uncovers prima facie evidence against officials until proved otherwise. This makes it easier for the SIU to recover financial losses suffered by the State when the need arises.

The SIU approached the Special Tribunal to freeze pension benefits of Dr Mhlongo after she resigned with immediate effect in June 2022, in the face of a disciplinary hearing, which emanated from SIU investigations in the affairs of the Department relating to the procurement of personal protective equipment (PPE) in response to Covid-19 pandemic.

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The SIU investigations have uncovered irregularities in the appointment of service providers Clinipro Pty Ltd, Pro Secure Pty Ltd, and Ndia Business Trading (Pty) Ltd for the supply and delivery of PPE items, which resulted in the Department incurring irregular expenditure and/or a fruitless and wasteful expenditure of approximately R182 million.

Furthermore, the SIU investigation revealed that Dr Mhlongo, as the accounting officer, allegedly exposed the Department to a wasteful expenditure when she authorised the procurement and payment of 10 000 cell phones to the value of R10 million for Covid-19 household screening. The Department could only manage to distribute 388 of the 10 000 cell phones between September 2020 and March 2021, and the cell phones were distributed without the required screening application, SIU investigation revealed. After the physical counting of cell phones in storage by SIU investigators in March 2021, the Department distributed 9588 cell phones to community health workers for Covid-19 vaccination without the required application installed.

The order by the Special Tribunal is the continuation of the implementation of the SIU investigation outcomes and consequence management to recover assets and financial losses suffered by State institutions and/or to prevent further losses. The SIU will continue to pursue officials who resign in the face of an investigation or in the face of a disciplinary action by freezing their pension benefits and institute civil litigation to recover financial losses suffered by state institutions.

Fraud and corruption allegations may be reported via the following platforms:

siu@hotline.co.za / **Hotline: 0800 037 774.**

Enquiries: Mr Kaizer Kganyago

Head of Stakeholder Relations and Communications

Special Investigation Unit

012 843 0048 / 082 306 8888 / kkganyago@siu.org.za

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